Conducting Violence Risk Assessments

Article Critique

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**Annotated Bibliography/Summary**

As the awareness of school violence increases there become more concerns regarding ways in which to predict and therefore, prevent serious acts of violence among youth in schools. Bernes and Bardick (2007) recommend that school counselors use two forms of assessment in order to provide a more comprehensive evaluation among students to ultimately plan and determine intervention strategies. The suggested assessments named by the authors were a general risk assessment such as the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY) and a targeted risk assessment, such as ACTION. Both assessments are appropriate to evaluate and assess male and female adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17, who may be more prone to violent behaviors.

The SAVRY assessment includes factors within the historical, social/contextual, individual, and protective domains of an individual’s life. Considerations within this assessment include past violent behaviors, abuse in the home, peer rejection, lack of personal or social support, management of anger, impulsivity, and a low commitment to school among others. The protective factors are those indicators, which are likely to decrease the risk of violent behavior, such as a strong commitment to school, a strong social support system, and strong attachments and bonds. Students may possess both risk factors and protective factors and each must be valued and assessed to determine the level of risk in order to plan the appropriate intervention.

The targeted violence risk assessment model ACTION, offers guidance for targeted violence by assessing the six areas of attitude, capacity, threshold, intent, others’ reactions, and noncompliance. The premise of the authors is that school counselors will become more and more responsible and accountable for the actions and behaviors of their students; therefore, these assessments were developed, so that a standard of practice be set for school counselors to follow.

**Critique**

The training and education for professional school counselors is becoming more extensive; it is only a matter of time for the accountability to become even more stringent. School counselors have a tremendous responsibility, which encompasses the academic, personal/social, and career development of each student**.**

Violence risk assessments are effective in school, but they can only predict so much. The authors indicated that the SAVRY needs more research for effectiveness; however, it does allow for a standard of practice for the school counseling profession.

Whenever a violent tragedy strikes a school, there is always clear hindsight vision into the actions of the perpetrator. The questions then become, how could we have seen this tragedy coming? How can we prevent this from happening in the future? In many, if not all of the recent tragic events within the school system, the warning signs are present; however, they are failed to be seen, disregarded, or go unreported.

The authors suggest school counselors use these comprehensive assessments as a standard of practice, in addition to maintaining appropriate professional development and consultation with other professionals, in order to pinpoint risk assessments, prevent violence in the schools, and avoid malpractice suits. In my opinion, all of these suggestions and assessments are a good place to begin, but this alone will not solve the problem. School counselors cannot possibly fight this battle alone. Educators, administrators, school counselors, and staff are going to have to work as a cooperative team to meet the needs of each student by engaging with the

students daily, getting to know them personally, and learning to know and understand the warning signs when they are present.

**Reference**

Bernes, K. & Bardick, A. (2007, April). Conducting adolescent violence risk assessments: A framework for school counselors. *Professional School Counseling*, 10(4), 419-427.